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PURPOSEFULNESS AND CO-OPERATION

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As purposefulness is the key word in composition and as co-operation is the need of the times, some of the schools are evolving graded systems of composition projects or class books. By such a system, composition has a definite purpose in every term of the course throughout the four years, and by it there is developed a remarkable spirit of social co-operation among the pupils of every English section.

1. *Purposefulness*.—In order that the practice of composition may have a definite aim, term by term, a graded series of large topics which engage the activities of the pupils has been worked out for one of the schools.

English 1. Environment in the home (largely narrative).

English 2. Environment in the school (largely descriptive).

English 3. Environment in the community (largely expository).

English 4. Vocational (expository and argumentative).

English 5. Newspapers and magazines.

English 6. Books.

English 7. Things of the will (largely argumentative).

English 8. Things of the spirit.

This series is of course subject to change, but during the past three years has shown itself capable of almost indefinite application.

For each term there is a specific purpose of doing something through the composition besides merely writing for the sake of writing. The purpose may be to produce a book that all the class members will relish reading. Then these books on their completion are placed in the school library. They are eagerly read and soon show the signs of use that are a joy to the up-to-date librarian. It may be that the members of a section aim to produce something that their parents and friends will like to read. At a recent parents'

meeting, the parents interestedly thronged the library looking for the projects about which they had heard so much at home. It may be that there are changes needed in the equipment, curriculum, or personnel of a school; the class book attempts to bring about a change in the conditions. For example, a student felt that there should be a domestic science course. For his contribution to *Local Problems and Their Solutions*, a seventh-term book, the student in question had an interview with the principal and found him favorable but unconvinced of immediate need for a domestic science course. Then the pupil organized a group of helpers to obtain information from every class regarding the number of girls who would take a domestic science course if it were established. Her tabulation she placed before the principal. This, added to his previous inclination, persuaded him at once to ask for the establishment of the course with the appointment of a teacher. In a book, *America and the War*, several pupils contributed articles of sufficient soundness and convincingness to be of real help in the Victory Loan drive. In working up vocational questions, pupils stimulate each other to choose a special field for work after the completion of high school, or compel their classmates to think seriously concerning what they are best fitted to do and how they are fitting themselves for this. The newspaper projects are purposeful in pushing out the pupils' mental horizons. In the book projects, much valuable and inspirational help has come from comments, studies, and reviews of the war literature. Through all the projects there runs the desire on the part of the pupils to produce something that will be interesting or inspirational or instructive to their classmates. Numbers of the pupils go to the public libraries for data, and they go with enthusiasm and come back aglow to report to their friends regarding the treasures they have found. Prefaces of some of the recent composition projects will show purposes in the minds of the pupils themselves:

a) These essays have been written by the sixth-term English class, for the purpose of leaving, as a reference for future supplementary reading, a definite record of books of the World War. Each student, in writing his essay, had this purpose in mind and endeavored to show the general impression of the book and its value to the reader. Poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction have been considered.

b) The purpose of our book is to suggest or indicate sources of information about the Community of Richmond Hill. The material is conveniently arranged to give prospective inhabitants of our town an idea of what our town as a whole represents. We, of course, wish to impress upon our new neighbors the fact that ours is a progressive suburb, although it is not far from the hustle and bustle of the heart of New York. We desire that they know all about our town, from its very origin, up to the present date. In this little book we endeavor to tell as much as is possible concerning our Parks, Trees and Birds, War Activities, Civic and Social Organizations, Buildings, Schools, Churches, and Homes.

Some of the books on "Things of the Spirit," such as *The Application of Art to Our Daily Lives*, *The Making of a Home*, *The Call of the West*, and *Where to Live*, have aroused the greatest possible interest in matters beyond the material facts of everyday life. Several of these books are now on exhibition at Teachers College, where they may be seen by anyone interested in this method of accomplishing purposefulness in composition work in the high school. Here is a schedule showing the seventeen successive recitation periods devoted to the production of a class book in one of the early terms of the experiment:

1. Decision of groups with regard to phase of subject.
2. Selection of individual topics.
3. The gathering of material from personal experience.
4. The gathering of material by word of mouth.
5. The gathering of material from newspapers and magazines.
6. The gathering of material from books.
7. The formulation of a sentence that will cover all you have to say on the subject.
8. The making of the topical outline.
9. The oral presentation of divisions of the subject.
10. Oral presentation.
11. Oral presentation.
12. First written draft.
13. Social group correction of drafts.
14. Perfection of final individual manuscripts. (Whether typewritten or written by hand.)
15. Arrangement of order of main divisions.
16. Preparing the book for publication.
17. The Great Day.

2. *Co-operation*.—To show how the plan engages the social activities of the students in orderly co-operation, three somewhat detailed prefaces written by editors of books may be more illuminating than any amount of comment or explanation by an older person.

A. This book consists of articles each describing a different element of "Our Community."

The method by which the material for the general design was gathered is set forth in the following paragraphs.

The scholars first became interested in making a study for several weeks of the subject "Our Community" in view of later on writing a book that might be worthy of publication by the local improvement association.

After discussions and exchange of letters among the members of the various social groups, it was finally decided that each group was to select a different subject and each member of the group was to study an individual part of the topic assigned to the group. This would be very interesting as no two individuals would have the same part, and much more could therefore be accomplished in this way.

When this much had been achieved, letters were again exchanged between the group members giving suggestions regarding sources of material to be studied.

Gathering of the substance was then taken up, and facts pertaining thereto were transcribed into the notebooks.

A topic sentence was then composed; the whole matter for each article was reduced to one sentence.

The group members now prepared a topical outline, using about six main headings to serve as a guide in the arrangement of what they had to say in their part of the book.

Then, the group members exchanged the topical outlines written by them, for the purpose of criticizing the same or of offering suggestions for corrections, submitting these suggestions in the form of letters.

Next, the group members thoroughly familiarized themselves with the contents of their own compositions before coming to class and then in class talked the compositions with only their outlines in hand.

After the oral presentation, the first drafts of the chosen subjects were written in the pencil notebooks. The same were then transmitted to the group members for criticism, which was accomplished by means of an inspection letter to the writer.

The pupils, profiting by the suggestions of their groupmates, revised their compositions, and then wrote them in their ink notebooks, care being taken to have at least five hundred words in the article.

These drafts were then written up with the utmost care and upon completion, were submitted in book form.

The writing of this book has been a pleasant task for the pupils, and the object attained is worthy of the effort. It teaches us the conception of proper composition. Studies of this nature are of the utmost value in preparing us to contend with problems which we may chance to encounter after we have completed our school days and have taken up our various walks in life.

B. This Composition Project of the 8-1 English Class of 1919 deals with a Matter of the Spirit. First, an assignment was dictated which was: "Write to the instructor a letter, suggesting a topic under Matters of the Spirit, on which it would be profitable to have the class work for some weeks with the purpose of widening the view of life." Many topics were brought in by the pupils. After full discussion, the class chose "Model Communities of the United States." Then the Social Groups discussed possibilities, and each chose a certain model community for study. Forest Hills, Pullman, Hershey, Peterboro, Gary, and Maplewood were those decided upon in the groups, each group taking one community. As soon as the topics were well in hand, members of the groups took particular subdivisions of the group topic.

Now the embryo book took shape rapidly. The students sent letters to their towns, asking questions and requesting information in the form of pamphlets and other literature. A decided effort was made to ask definite questions in the letters. Some met with disappointments. One member sent his letter to the wrong place. A few letters were never heard from, but excellent results were obtained by all the groups.

The members received many pamphlets, letters, pictures, and other sources of valuable information. Miss Moriya, one of the group writing on Hershey, was very successful. If the book turns out well, a box of Hershey chocolates is promised her by the Principal of one of the Hershey schools. Here's hoping! Other groups, too, met with success. Peterboro, Forest Hills, Gary, and Maplewood, have turned out well. Members of the groups writing on Forest Hills and Maplewood made visits to their towns and took down first hand information and took pictures. Other groups, too, though far from their subject city, obtained much useful information by letters and interviews. Every single student was busy collecting and arranging all sorts of material.

The whole amount of energy and ingenuity represented in this book is very great. People who it was thought had any knowledge to spare on the subject were interviewed. The mails were kept busy with correspondence, and the students acted like regular newspaper reporters. We obtained *results*.

Then followed an assignment for running outline; then an oral presentation of material; after this came the first draft. Finally the second draft came. Next, each essay was proof-read and corrected by a group member. Then the group leaders re-proof-read them. One of the girls was business-like enough to hire a willing and accurate worker in a typewriting class to type-write our book, as some others, less accurate, asked too absurd a price. The

cover design was made by the art-editor and the binding and workmanship are original with the class, which has bound several class books before.

This book is the pride of every one in the class, as it is the Class's last work in school. As hard labor deserves merit, the instructor praised the spirit and the "go-get-'em" attitude to push through the work, which characterizes the class of June 1919. With painstaking care, the work gradually formed from bits of information to definite and full outlines, to essays, and to finished book. Throughout the book an effective plan to connect essays and chapters into a unit has been successfully followed out. The class hopes that the finished volume will be appreciated as a literary monument to recall the class of June 1919, and that it will serve as a useful aid to future Seniors in widening their views of life.

C. Several weeks ago, the instructor dictated a very interesting advanced assignment to our English Class, the Seven-Six Class. The title of this lesson was "The Class Book." Just what was the Class Book? We were soon informed on this point by our instructor. This lesson was the preliminary lesson.

On our return to class, the following day, we were all set, for deciding what kind of book we should publish. There were many, many titles suggested by enthusiastic members of our division. Finally, the topic, "Colleges for Us," was decided upon, as the name for the Class Book. There was a definite end in view, when our class decided upon such a title. Many pupils come to high school, and find themselves in the senior grades, ignorant of the requirements for the various colleges of America. Thus, these unfortunate students are often compelled to spend a year or more, wastefully, in taking a post-graduate course in some subject which they need for college entrance, but which they neglected to study, as they were unfamiliar with their college's requirements. The Seven-Six Class will help to do away with all this. Our project incidentally covers the entrance requirements of the important American institutions of learning and shows the relative merits of the different curricula, surroundings, and social benefits.

After deciding upon a title for our book, we had to decide upon how the work should be divided. Thus, the social groups were assigned a main sub-topic, each. All the members of the respective social groups got together, and brought in all the information and interesting facts that they were able to gather, with relation to the topic of their group. This proved to be an interesting lesson for all of us. After each group had been definitely assigned its topics, it necessarily followed that the individual members of the social groups should be assigned their subjects. All the members of the groups came together in class, and at a given signal by our teacher, we conferred with our co-members on the subjects we were to write on. There were many opportunities given for such conferences by our leader, which helped to make our work more interesting and more successful, because of such co-operation.

After the individual scholar had been assigned his part, toward the Class Book, the teacher allowed us several days in which to gather our material. There were several pleasant days in class spent on the discussion of "material." Much of our material was gathered from practical experiences. That is, the students interviewed friends of theirs, who had attended colleges. Material was also gained thru the kindness of our own school's faculty; Mr. Landers, Mr. Stilson, and Dr. Gaston, were especially helpful in giving students information for "Colleges for Us." More material was gathered from the use of catalogues. Many members sent for catalogues from various colleges, while some were given great assistance thru the kindness of Mr. Dann. Still others wrote to friends attending colleges and received valuable information, and pretty, amusing, and interesting photographs, snapshots, and pictures, which all help to make "Colleges for Us" a finished volume.

After these discussions, on "Gathering of Material," came the oral presentation. This proved to be the most amusing and novel of all our meetings. I refer, in particular, to our "Living Book," composed of the entire membership of the class, perhaps the only "Living Book" ever published, who can tell? The first drafts soon followed the oral presentation of the brief. These were given to the group leaders for proof reading. Then they were returned, corrected, to the proper owners. The final drafts were soon forthcoming. Then several important matters were settled. An Editor-in-Chief and several assistants were selected. Then a Typewriting Committee was selected. Those who could have the projects done themselves, were permitted to do so. The rest of the work was done by the Typewriting Committee. The book has been bound (we think, handsomely) in order to preserve it more effectively.

The book, "Colleges for Us," will always stand as a book "Rendering loyal service ever" to the future Richmond Hill High School Students, and as a lasting tribute to the Seven-Six English Class.

If, then, the composition projects which the boys and girls enter upon with zest and enthusiasm, as indicated by their prefaces, are successful in arousing a distinct purpose of accomplishing something and if they always arouse a hearty spirit of co-operation, they may be considered as a worthy experiment. In fact, these composition projects or class books have passed beyond the experimental stage and established themselves on firm ground through their purposefulness and their co-operation.